



Executive Office of Health and Human Services

Department of Children, Youth & Families • Department of Elderly Affairs • Department of Health •
Department of Human Services • Department of Mental Health, Retardation & Hospitals

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New Coffee Plus Café and Gift Shop Benefits Veterans and Legally Blind Individuals

On January 15, 2008, the Rhode Island Division of Veterans Affairs and the Office of Rehabilitation Services, Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired hosted a ceremonial ribbon cutting to showcase the newest Coffee Plus enterprise at the Rhode Island Veterans Home in Bristol. The Veterans Home Coffee Plus Café and Gift Shop is a strategic business partnership that benefits both the veterans who live at the Home as well as the legally-blind small business operators who will run the enterprise.

“After our last coffee shop closed, I saw the opportunity to bring together the leadership from the Veterans Home and Office of Rehabilitation Services,” said Bill Camera, Acting Deputy Director of the Department of Human Services. “In four short months we were able to renovate the space, set up operations, and open for business.”

The Café and Gift Shop provides a venue where veterans can gather and socialize with their peers and their families, much like they would if they were living in the community. In addition to selling food and beverages, the Café and Gift Shop stocks greeting cards, newspapers, magazines, and small gift items that the veterans can purchase for their loved ones.

“Going to the Café promotes independence and a high level functioning for our residents,” said Rick Baccus, Acting Administrator for the Rhode Island Veterans Home. “All of the tables are filled when I pass by. That is a sign of success on many levels.”

In addition to the immediate benefit for the veterans, the Coffee Plus Café and Gift Shop will ultimately provide a legally blind individual the unique opportunity to operate his or her own small business. The Café and Gift Shop is being run currently by the Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired who have hired a resident from the Veterans Home until a permanent operator is identified and trained.

“Our Business Enterprise Program establishes entrepreneurial opportunities for individuals who are legally blind,” said Laurie DiOrio, Assistant Administrator of the Office of Rehabilitation Services. “Our goal is to assist individuals with disabilities to become employed and to live independently in the community. We hope to identify an eligible individual from the East Bay to operate this shop long term.”

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While Coffee Plus enterprises have focused primarily on food service, the Veterans Home Café and Gift Shop represents an expansion into the retail arena. If successful, the Office of Rehabilitation Service hopes to make this expansion opportunity available to other Coffee Plus operators across the state.

The Veterans Home Café and Gift Shop is open Monday through Friday from 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM and Saturday and Sunday from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM.

The Office of Rehabilitation Services' Business Enterprises Program establishes food service entrepreneurial opportunities for individuals who are legally blind using under the "Coffee Plus" trade name. The Office of Rehabilitative Services identifies the location, renovates the facility and installs equipment, procures initial stock and provides initial operating cash. All proceeds from the business accrue to the vendor except for a small set aside fee, which the State collects to maintain equipment and provide a safety net for program operation. Individuals who are legally blind are trained and licensed by the Office of Rehabilitative Services. There are currently 19 Coffee Plus shops located across the state operated by 15 licensed vendors. The Business Enterprises Program was established under the federal Randolph-Sheppard Act.

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For more information visit [Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired Business Enterprise Program website](#).